

Last week, President Barack Obama delivered his first State of the Union address to Congress and the nation. This was, in fact, his third speech before a Joint Session of the Congress since he took office just over a year ago.

A portion of his one hour and 15 minute remarks was devoted to allaying the American people's concerns about the struggling economy, continued double digit unemployment and government's dramatic overspending. However, much of what he had to say sounded, at least to me, a lot like his past speeches during which he emphasized a greater role of government in everything from health care choice, to how we heat and cool our homes.

He touted his \$787 billion stimulus bill as having saved about two million jobs and he called for a second such spending bill. There is widespread disagreement over the true impact of the president's colossal stimulus bill. Accountability over these funds has been called into question and it is believed that very few jobs have actually been created.

I opposed the first stimulus, and I voted against the second stimulus which passed the House on December 16 and still awaits Senate approval.

The president also walked a political tightrope, trying to balance the public's desires for greater control over federal red ink spending, with his own goals of expanding government's reach into health care and energy. Despite recent polls showing the American people feel Washington is distracted with costly programs that are not addressing the economy, the president did not back away from continuing to pursue either of his controversial health care or national energy tax programs.

Even while he advocated these big government programs, he decried government red ink and pledged to freeze a portion of federal “discretionary” spending for three years in order to rein in the deficit. The amount the president would actually freeze amounts to only 17 percent of the budget and it would not take effect until next year. However, many of the programs that he would freeze have recently seen significant funding increases (at his request) and would, therefore, be locked in at more generous spending levels.

When you consider that the Congressional Budget Office has scored this year’s budget deficit at \$1.35 trillion, the president is merely trimming around the edges when he proposes to freeze only 17 percent of the budget.

The best way to revive the economy is by halting this administration’s reckless spending and big government expansion programs that have shaken investor confidence and stymied business growth. There’s still time for the president and the Democrats in Congress to embrace a bipartisan approach to reviving our economy and promoting job growth. Unfortunately, I am not yet convinced the president is truly interested in bipartisan solutions to our country’s problems. His actions will have to match his words.

Unemployment Shows Recession Far from Over:

Alabama's unemployment rate rose in December to 11 percent - a one-half percent increase over November. This is the highest unemployment level in our state in 26 years. Twenty Alabama counties now record unemployment over 14 percent, including Washington at 14.3 percent, Clarke at 16.3 percent, Monroe at 20.2 percent, and neighboring Wilcox County with 24.5 percent unemployment.

These levels are unacceptable and illustrate that our economy is still slow to recover. That's why I found it almost offensive when the president said last Wednesday night that the worst of the economy is behind us.

That may be true in Washington, DC, but the president would have a hard time convincing people in Monroe, Clarke, Washington and Wilcox counties that good times are here again.

Now Accepting Internship Applications:

Each summer my office sponsors a Congressional Intern Program for students from southwest Alabama. If you are from Baldwin, Clarke, Escambia, Mobile, Monroe, or Washington County and have completed one semester of college, you are eligible for a congressional internship in my Washington, D.C. office, my Mobile office, or my Baldwin County office.

The application for summer 2010 internships is posted on my website <http://bonner.house.gov>. The deadline for submission is Friday, February 19, 2010.

Please mail your completed application to 11 North Water Street, Suite 15290, Mobile, AL., 36602, or fax to 202-225-0562.

Every effort will be made to accommodate all applicants; however, in the event more applications are received than can be accommodated, priority will be given to rising seniors who currently reside in the First District of Alabama.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721 or visit my website at <http://bonner.house.gov>.